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GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, AND FOR THE PEOPLE: STAKEHOLDER'S ENGAGEMENT IN SERVICE DELIVERY PLANNING IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract. This article examines stakeholder involvement in service delivery planning within local government, focusing on Polokwane Local Municipality. Local governments' proximity to stakeholders through integrated development planning (IDP) enables a comprehensive understanding of their needs. Municipalities are legally required to ensure active stakeholder participation, reflecting a governance model of "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." Drawing on Patsy Healey's (1997) collaborative planning theory, the article uses a mixed methodology, including probability sampling of 80 respondents for questionnaires and purposive sampling of 3 respondents for semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal a significant deficit in service delivery due to inadequate stakeholder engagement, despite satisfactory legislative compliance. Challenges include demonstrations, resource constraints, service backlogs, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, and corruption. Recommendations emphasize prioritizing stakeholder involvement and enhancing institutional capacity to optimize resources, address poverty, and improve service delivery.

Keywords: *Stakeholder Engagement, Service Delivery, Planning, Consultation, Collaborative Planning, Decentralisation.*

Rezumat. Articolul examinează implicarea părților interesate în planificarea furnizării de servicii în cadrul guvernului local, concentrându-se pe municipalitatea locală Polokwane. Apropierea autorităților locale de părțile interesate prin planificarea integrată a dezvoltării (IDP) permite o înțelegere cuprinzătoare a nevoilor acestora. Municipaliitățile sunt obligate prin lege să asigure participarea activă a părților interesate, reflectând un model de „guvernare a oamenilor, de către oameni și pentru oameni”. Bazându-se pe teoria de planificare colaborativă a lui Patsy Healey (1997), articolul folosește o metodologie mixtă, incluzând eșantionarea probabilă a 80 de respondenți pentru chestionare și eșantionarea

intenționată a 3 respondenți pentru interviurile semi-structurate. Constatările relevă un deficit semnificativ în furnizarea de servicii din cauza implicării inadecvate a părților interesate, în ciuda respectării satisfăcătoare a legislației. Provocările includ demonstrații, constrângeri de resurse, întârzieri de servicii, monitorizare și evaluare inadecvate, precum și corupție. Recomandările subliniază necesitatea implicării părților interesate și creșterea capacității instituționale de a optimiza resursele, de a aborda sărăcia și de a îmbunătăți furnizarea de servicii.

Cuvinte cheie: *Implicarea părților interesate, Furnizare de servicii, Planificare, Consultare, Planificare colaborativă, Descentralizare.*

1. Introduction

The local government encounters a significant level of complexity and is confronted with multiple challenges that require attention and resolution [1]. Stakeholder engagement in service delivery planning is paramount to ensure the achievement of the required level of service delivery standards. Including stakeholders in service delivery planning has been identified as a crucial aspect of the integrated development planning (IDP) process. One could argue that stakeholders are inadequately afforded opportunities to engage in the IDP process. Ensuring the active engagement and participation of stakeholders in the formulation of plans and policies holds substantial importance for local governing bodies [2]. Based on the scholarly research conducted by [3], the scope of public engagement within the context of local government in South Africa is constrained by specific factors. The proposition is further supported by [4] which identified and explained the various constraints within the field. One of the main limitations pertains to the apprehensions raised regarding the management of internally displaced people (IDP), which can be attributed to the substantial scale of urban areas. The significant magnitude of this event leads to a state of fatigue and disengagement among the general population, commonly referred to as participation fatigue.

The topic of public involvement in municipalities is a significant challenge, particularly when it pertains to effectively engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process [4]. The existing arrangements of IDP representatives appear to demonstrate a lack of effectiveness in promoting substantial stakeholder engagement. Individuals who do not possess land ownership or secure jobs frequently face multifarious challenges.

Furthermore, as evidenced by [5], indigenous administrative entities in the South African context face significant challenges in their efforts to implement the IDP and effectively deliver vital services to their constituents. According to [6] there is evidence indicating a significant lack of effectiveness in the planning and implementation of IDP efforts in rural regions. Because of this deficiency, there is a noticeable scarcity of sustainable services in the areas. There have been documented occurrences of service delivery demonstrations in different areas of the country [5]. The ongoing demonstrations have been driven by the widespread dissatisfaction and increasing irritation felt by the local population. Recently, there has been a notable emergence of social dissatisfaction accompanied by corresponding political difficulties. In a scholarly inquiry carried out by [7], it was revealed that a majority of 51% of the respondents expressed the opinion that municipal administrations should improve their current protocols and systems regarding public participation. Implementing this approach would facilitate a more significant and efficient interaction with the general population [8].

Theoretical Framework- Collaborative Planning Theory

The article employed the conventional and persuasive framework of collaborative planning as proposed by Patsy Healey in her influential literature, *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies* (1997). Healey's original theory focused on the complex dynamics through which stakeholders in local communities exert their influence on the development of communal spaces and the definition of their shared interests. The influence is attained using communication, even if there may not be a common cultural background among the individuals involved [9,10]. Collaborative planning is a procedural framework that plays a crucial role in the formulation of public policies, making it an essential component of democratic governance in a particular jurisdiction [11]. Collaborative planning and practice play a crucial role in ensuring the necessary standard of service delivery [1].

The concept of collaborative planning in service delivery involves government entities actively engaging in harmonious cooperation with various stakeholders, utilising a range of strategies and approaches [12]. The distinction between the government's role and the participation of different societal entities in collaborative planning is often unclear [12,13]. Contrary to popular belief, it experiences a significant transformation and is constantly being challenged. In this scholarly study, the concept of collaborative planning is examined, highlighting its dualistic nature that includes both a societal facet and a governmental facet. Collaborative planning is a comprehensive and interactive approach that seeks to determine the best way to deliver services [14]. This theory exhibits alignment with specific aspects of South Africa's contemporary society.

The concept of collaborative planning has gained widespread acceptance among contemporary scholars and practitioners in the field of local governance. This consensus is supported by [15]. The concept of collaborative planning challenges the Lockean perspective that views individuals as isolated entities. Instead, it aligns with an Aristotelian understanding of humans as inherently social and political beings [14]. Collaborative planning is a planning theory that is widely praised for its suitability in community settings. It is known for prioritising the development of a fair and comprehensive institutional framework that promotes dialogue among various stakeholders, including both public and private entities [11]. Collaborative planning processes typically rely on representatives from established democratic institutions within a specific geographic area. These processes only involve individuals directly involved in the planning decision and do not occur outside of the established framework.

Given the current circumstances surrounding the diversity of lifestyles, the collaborative planning theory focuses on how local stakeholders can exert their influence over the spaces they share. The influence is observed in the communication process, where stakeholders express and define their shared interests and goals [10]. Collaborative planning is a new planning paradigm that is specifically designed to address the complex nature of modern society [16]. The approach effectively utilises consensus-building techniques to navigate and resolve conflicts among multiple stakeholders. To discover innovative ideas, achieve significant results, and develop the skills of the organisation, it encourages stakeholders to actively participate in a discussion that promotes fairness, empowerment, and the sharing of knowledge [16-18]. Policymakers could increase stakeholder engagement by promoting collaborative planning. The study is highly influenced by the theory of collaborative planning, which aligns well with the current legal frameworks of South Africa. The legal framework being discussed is the White Paper on Public Service Delivery

Transformation of 1997, which is based on the respected Batho Pele principles. The theoretical framework is based on the idea of actively engaging the stakeholders. The study suggests that local government authorities and municipalities should follow the collaborative planning theory, which emphasises the importance of involving stakeholders actively in the planning processes.

2. Materials and Methods

The article used convergent parallel research methods to examine stakeholder engagement and participation in service planning, focusing on Polokwane Local Municipality (PLM) as a case study. The article used a non-probability sampling technique to randomly select 80 respondents. Respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire with close-ended responses. In addition, the study also included 3 respondents who were selected through purposive sampling. These respondents were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured interview schedule. Prior to the collection of empirical data for this study, the researchers diligently sought and obtained an ethical clearance certificate [HS22/6/39] from the University of the Western Cape, specifically from the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, on September 12th, 2022. The researcher (s) duly ascertained and ensured compliance with all requisite research ethics and integrity prerequisites. Furthermore, an informed consent was duly acquired from all individuals who participated in the study. The participants were furnished with a comprehensive elucidation of the purpose and goals of the study. The individuals involved in the study were additionally requested to peruse and affix their signature to the consent document, demonstrating their voluntary commitment to partake in the research endeavour. All the subjects participating in the study provided a completed informed consent prior to their involvement. This study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis methodologies. In this fashion, the empirical data acquired via open-ended questionnaires were subjected to analysis employing the software application Microsoft Excel. The data were subjected to analysis using descriptive statistical methods. Hence, the utilisation of bar graphs and pie charts was employed to effectively present and elucidate the findings. Conversely, the acquisition of qualitative data was facilitated by conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews. These interviews were subsequently subjected to rigorous analysis using the thematic content analysis approach, with the aid of NVivo software for the transcription of interview recordings. The process of data collection and subsequent analysis was carried out until the point of saturation was achieved.

3. Results

3.1. Stakeholders Involved in Service Delivery Planning

- **Ward Councillors**

Ward Councillors play a significant role as stakeholders within the municipality and society. Furthermore, councillors must effectively communicate with the municipality regarding the specific service delivery needs and obstacles that have an impact on the members of the community [19]. Ward councillors play a crucial role in the service delivery planning process by ensuring that their wards are included in the IDP [6,20]. Additionally, they are responsible for facilitating public involvement and consultation processes in the planning phase. Municipal councillors have several responsibilities [21,22]. These include acting as representatives of the community they serve, providing leadership in councils, acting as custodians and guardians of public finance, promoting a cooperative governance

ethos, providing effective oversight over the municipal executive and council officials, being accountable to local communities, reporting back to their constituencies on council matters, and being responsive to the communities they serve. The leadership role, duties, and responsibilities of councillors towards their communities in South Africa are defined and mandated by the municipal Code of Conduct for Councillors, among other legislative measures. The primary responsibility is to serve and represent all community members in the constituency, regardless of their political affiliation. It is important to avoid any situations that may give rise to a conflict of interest [23]. Ward councillors, in their role as elected representatives, are responsible for demonstrating leadership and ensuring accountability to their constituencies. The key responsibility of councillors is to establish and maintain accountability between the municipality and the individuals it serves [24].

- **Ward Committee**

According to Article 6 of the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), Ward Committees and their members have specific roles in local government. These roles include assessing and approving the budget and planning and developing the IDP. Ward committees need to collaborate with councillors and other community organisations to identify priority needs and ensure that these needs are included in the budget proposals and plans [25, p.45]. The establishment of ward committees by local municipalities in South Africa is in line with the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). These committees serve as a mechanism to engage stakeholder communities in public affairs [26]. The ward committee serves to facilitate effective communication between the ward and the local council through the ward councillor [27]. Ward committees play a crucial role in ensuring that the electorate actively engages and has a say in the decision-making process of the council [25]. Individuals need to be integrated into the processes and structures that have an impact on their lives as ordinary citizens. Ward committees are widely seen as ineffective in promoting stakeholder participation in local government [25]. The lack of skills is a significant challenge faced by ward committees and municipalities across South Africa [26]. In certain instances, the ability of ward councillors to publicly justify the development decisions made by municipal councils was hindered due to their lack of understanding of the technical aspects involved. One criticism is that ward committee members often serve as mere extensions of political parties and may not adequately represent the diverse interests within communities [26,28]. The effectiveness of ward committees in facilitating communication between municipal councils and communities is hindered by inadequate municipal communication strategies and a lack of easily accessible information at the ward level [28]. Ward committees face various challenges, including financial and infrastructure limitations, limited understanding of local government laws and regulations, and interference from political entities [29]. The ward committee faces significant challenges that hinder its ability to hold the municipal council and councillors accountable.

- **Municipal Council**

Council members have a significant role in the IDP process. Their role as mediators between the community and the council enables them to help find mutually acceptable resolutions to local government issues [30]. The IDP serves as more than just a decision-making mechanism [31]. It also considers the desires and preferences of its constituents. It is important for council members to actively participate in the process to ensure that the concerns and interests of their communities are adequately represented and considered. The

council has the responsibility to approve both the service delivery planning process and the IDP document [6]. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Municipal Council assumes control and assumes a prominent position in coordinating the comprehensive management of the service delivery planning process. Municipal councils in South African municipalities face challenges with unstable coalitions. The adoption of coalition governance in municipalities has resulted in instability and compromised service delivery [32]. This conclusion is supported by recent national trends and developments.

- ***Municipal Officials***

The process of IDP service delivery planning recognises municipal officials, including the accounting officer, as significant stakeholders [6]. The recognition is stipulated in the Municipal Finance Management Act (Act 56 of 2003). The responsibilities of the accounting officer, commonly known as the Municipal Manager, encompass the coordination and compilation of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) document, as well as the supervision of its execution. The municipal manager must demonstrate complete objectivity and impartiality, like that of a judge [33]. They should refrain from aligning themselves with any specific political party within the municipal council. In the present situation, it appears highly challenging for municipal managers to remain apolitical due to the influence of political parties in making recommendations and influencing appointments within municipalities. When individuals choose not to prioritise loyalty to the administrative hierarchy in situations where unethical or illegal activity seems to be accepted, it becomes evident that this decision carries significant risks, leads to isolation, and incurs financial burdens [33]. Municipal officials in South Africa have a significant impact on advancing the development agenda of the national government and promoting the growth of democratic values within municipalities [34].

- ***Municipal Stakeholders***

The primary objective of the IDP process is to facilitate the discernment and elucidation of the requisites and inclinations of stakeholders and the community residing within a given municipality. This measure is undertaken to address and enhance the overall well-being of individuals impacted by said procedure [35]. The core focus of the IDP's needs identification approach lies in fostering community and stakeholder interaction and participation. According to the Constitution and the Municipal Systems Act, it is apparent that municipalities have a responsibility to promote the engagement and commitment of their stakeholders by implementing an effective participation mechanism [5]. Ensuring the participation of historically excluded groups is of utmost importance for the municipality to incorporate their specific needs and objectives into the planning and implementation of various projects and programmes [36]. The municipal stakeholder forums consist of various stakeholders, including Traditional Authorities, the Community, the Business Sector, Traditional Healers, Government Departments, the Education Sector, Non-Governmental Organisations, the Transport Sector, Financial Institutions, Farmers, Civic Organisations, and Religious Groups. The municipal stakeholders bear the task of ensuring social accountability within the municipality. Stakeholders possess a significant interest in the successful supply of services and development within the municipality. The stakeholders encompassed in this context comprise community members, municipalities, investors, suppliers, interest groups, non-governmental organisations, organisations, and traders [37].

- **Provincial and national sector departments**

It is imperative that the efficacy of all governmental departments at both the national and provincial levels actively engage in the process of Integrated Development Planning (IDP). The IDP process necessitates a collaborative and synchronised endeavour including officials from many sectors, rather than being simply the duty of the municipality's planning department [30,31]. A significant obstacle encountered by municipalities everywhere pertains to the absence of integration between sectoral plans and programmes with the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and respective departments. The absence of integration can be ascribed to multiple issues, with one of them being the incapacity to demonstrate the interconnections among different sector plans and departments [35]. The IDP should function as a comprehensive framework for provincial and national sector departments to effectively allocate resources at the local level. In the process of formulating their policies and strategies, municipalities must take into account the policies and programmes of sector departments [30]. Engaging in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process is crucial for sector departments to ensure effective coordination between their programmes and those of the municipalities, thereby serving their best interests. As to the White Paper on Local Government, the concept of development-oriented local government entails the active engagement of local authorities in partnership with local communities to ascertain sustainable solutions that address their requirements and enhance their overall well-being. The notion of development-oriented local government highlights the significance of public participation in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process, as it enhances the perceived legitimacy of development initiatives by fostering a sense of community ownership towards municipal programmes or projects [38].

- **Traditional Leaders**

A traditional leader can be defined as a traditional monarch who possesses authority within the indigenous system of African governance [39]. There exists a variation in the interpretation of the word "traditional leadership" among researchers, with the consensus being that it refers to leadership structures prevalent in rural areas, characterised by the presence of hereditary leaders such as chiefs and monarchs [40]. The traditional leadership framework in South Africa is renowned for its proficiency and involvement in community Integrated Development Plan (IDP) processes, which hold significant potential for enhancing the welfare of the communities they cater to. This phenomenon is notably apparent in the realms of service provision and community advancement [35,41,42]. The inclusion of traditional leaders in the integrated development planning process enhances their significance as key stakeholders in service delivery planning. The inclusion of traditional leaders in the decision-making process regarding community services can potentially enhance service delivery. This is due to the involvement of certain traditional leaders in the governance and management of the local council, as mandated by the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998.

- **Mass Media**

Mass media have emerged as a potent tool for ensuring the accountability of public officials with their behaviour while in office [43]. In the context of modern democratic systems, the government use mass media to engage citizens in the process of decision-making [44]. Hence, mass media can be regarded as a vehicle for ensuring public accountability. It is evident that in the current day, the media are increasingly being utilised

as a widely employed mechanism to ensure governmental authorities are held responsible on a global scale, particularly within the context of South Africa [45]. Furthermore, mass media have the potential to serve as both a catalyst for democracy and a tool for democratic governance. This is achieved through their ability to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of good governance by promoting openness, accountability, and adherence to other fundamental principles [43]. The media, under their role, serve to bring to light instances of power abuse and eventually ensure that public authorities are held responsible for their conduct. The mass media serves the purpose of disseminating information regarding the actions and decisions of public authorities and governments, enabling the public to form their assessments and judgements [46]. New media contribute to the promotion of good governance within a democratic society. Even though mass media serve the purpose of promoting public accountability, they are not without obstacles. Furthermore, posits that profit-oriented media outlets occasionally engage in deceptive practices that mislead the general audience [44 p.49, 47, 48 p.28]. The media's function has evolved into a multifaceted, biased, and deceptive entity [49]. The behaviour exhibited by these individuals poses a threat to the burgeoning democracy and hinders the achievement of effective governance in South Africa.

3.2. Presentation of Quantitative Results

The primary aim of this research is to gain insight into the principal stakeholders engaged in the process of service delivery planning, with a specific focus on the Polokwane municipal area, utilising the Bloodriver village as a case study. It intends to investigate and comprehend the characteristics, functions, and extent of engagement of stakeholders in the service delivery planning process within the Polokwane municipal area. In the subsequent analysis, several questions or themes are examined.

3.2.1. Driver of the process of Stakeholder engagement in the service delivery planning

The participants in this section were asked, 'Who is driving the process of public participation in service delivery planning?' Thus, Figure 1 shows communities' knowledge and understanding of who is responsible for driving the process of public participation in service delivery planning.

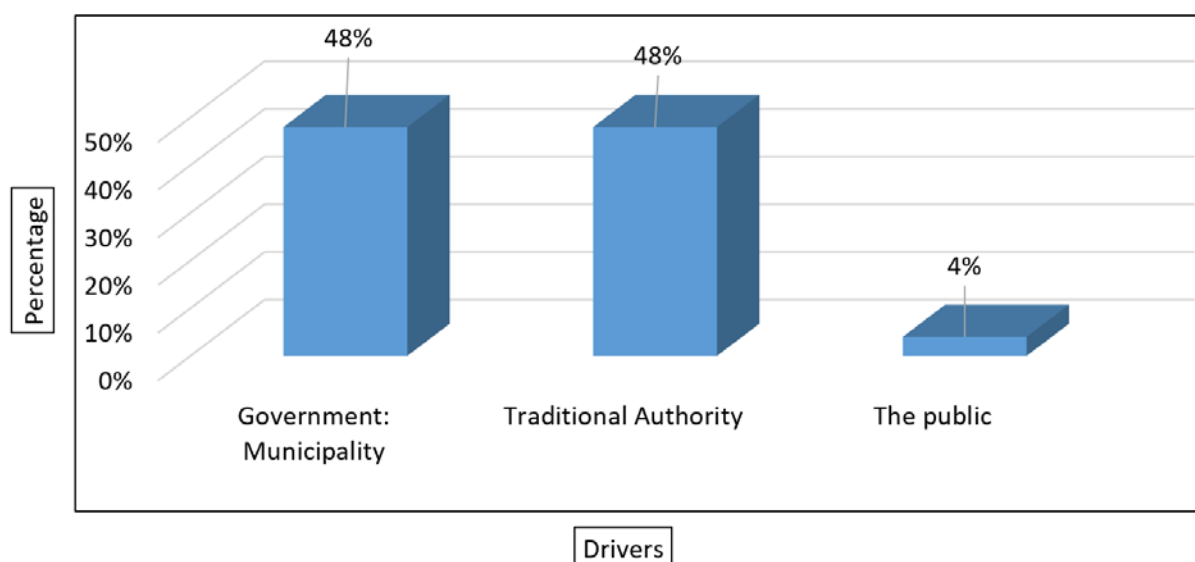


Figure 1. Driver of the process of stakeholder engagement in the service delivery planning.

Figure 1 above illustrates who was responsible for the public participation process in planning service delivery within the community. To this end, Figure 1 shows that most respondents, 48%, indicated that the government, i.e., the municipality, was responsible for facilitating public participation in service delivery planning. In addition, the following graph shows that another majority of respondents (48%) indicated that traditional authorities drive the process of public participation in service delivery planning, while the minority of respondents (4%) indicated that the public is responsible for ensuring public participation in service delivery planning. Therefore, community members do not know how to manage and direct public participation in service planning in their community. According to the study, participants were unable to accurately determine who they believed was responsible for planning services and instead relied on guesswork. The fact that a majority of 48% of the respondents felt that the traditional agency is responsible for service planning shows that there is still much work to be done in local government. The results from figure 1 show that the dispute between traditional authorities and local government officials has continued to intensify, as traditional leaders believe that they are leading the process of public participation in service delivery planning. The literature on service delivery argues that there is a conflict between traditional leaders and local councils. It can be argued that the struggle between traditional leaders and the local council undermines an agenda of where appropriate services should be delivered.

3.2.2. The effectiveness of public participation in service delivery planning

The participants in this section were asked if public participation was effective in service delivery planning. Thus, Figure 2 shows communities' knowledge and understanding of the effectiveness of public participation in service delivery planning.

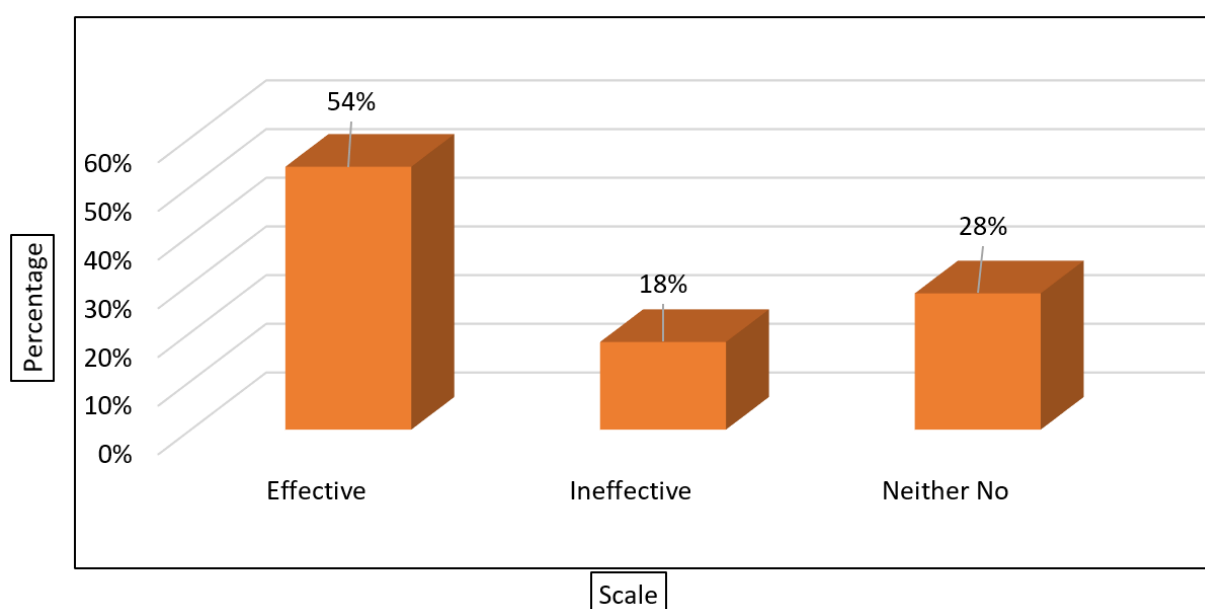


Figure 2. Effectiveness of public participation in service delivery planning.

Figure 2 above illustrates the efficacy of public participation in public service delivery planning. To this end, Figure 2 shows that most respondents, 54%, indicated that public participation is effective in planning service delivery. On the other hand, 28% of the respondents denied the effectiveness of public participation in service delivery, while the minority of 18% indicated that public participation is ineffective in service delivery planning.

The results in the figure below show that public participation is of utmost importance in a democratic country, as it gives people the opportunity to express their needs and concerns. Public participation strengthens and promotes people's engagement in matters that affect them. This enables the government to identify the services that citizens need. Service delivery is seen as an important factor in improving the quality of life and ensuring better access to socio-economic services. Citizen participation leads to a different way of knowing things. Things that were not known before, that were concealed or hidden, enter the public domain and become known to all stakeholders or relevant people for whom they were intended. As a result, the process of planning service delivery becomes easily feasible. Through citizen participation, resources are not wasted based on priorities set by the public.

3.2.3. The Status Quo of Public Participation in Service Delivery Planning

The participants in this section were asked what the status quo of public participation in service delivery planning was. Thus, Figure 3 shows communities' knowledge and understanding of the status quo of public participation in service delivery planning. Figure 3 shows that most respondents, 54%, said it was poor and 31% said it was very good. In contrast, 11% of the respondents indicated that the status quo of public participation in service delivery planning was very poor and only 1% indicated that it was very good, while 3% of respondents were not sure. Clearly, most respondents were not satisfied with public participation in service delivery planning. A limited number of participants expressed contentment with the level of public involvement in the planning of service delivery. It was emphasised that the local government should actively promote community engagement in service delivery planning, as this would enable them to effectively tackle the existing backlog in service provision within their society.

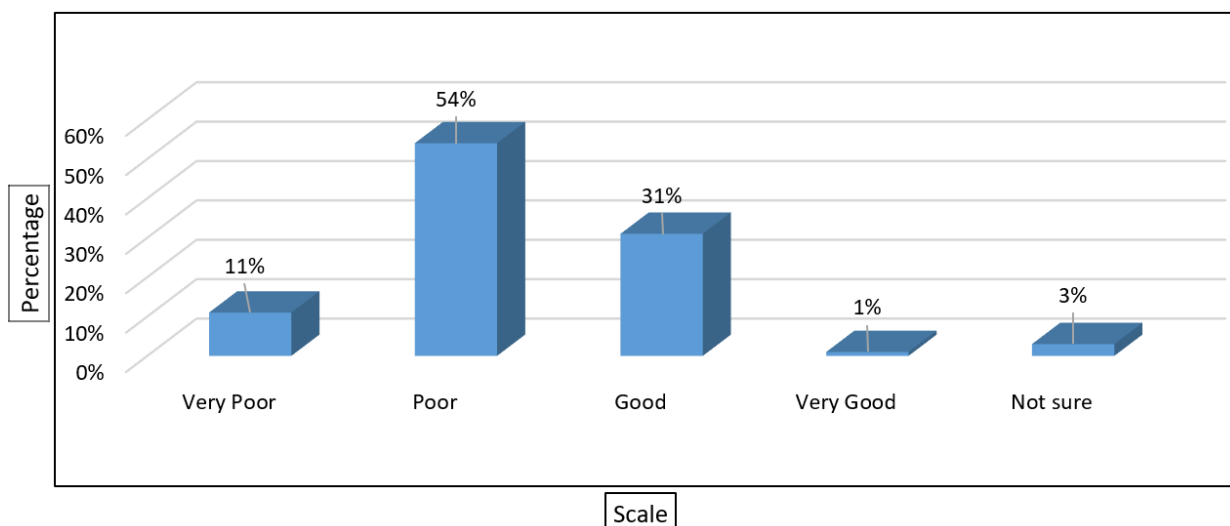


Figure 3. The Status Quo of public participation in service delivery planning.

Hence, the involvement of community members and other relevant stakeholders should not be overlooked, as it constitutes both a legal obligation and a fundamental democratic tenet that necessitates implementation.

3.2.4. Service delivery planning approach adopted by the municipality

The participants were asked what service delivery planning approach was being adopted by the municipality. Thus, Figure 4 shows communities' knowledge and understanding of the service delivery planning approach is being adopted by the municipality.

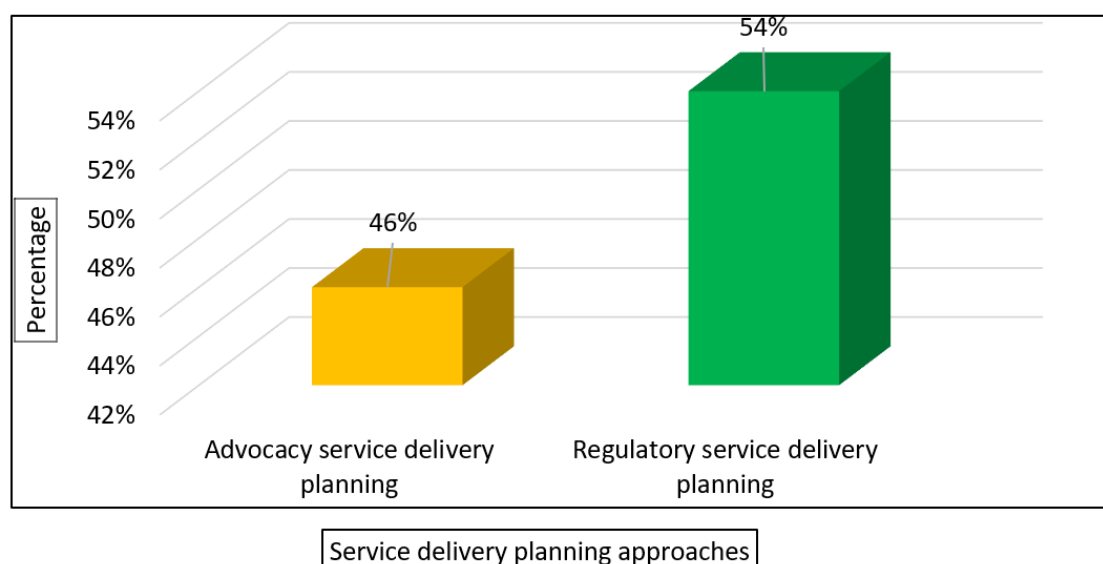


Figure 4. Service delivery planning approaches adopted by the municipality.

Figure 4 focuses on respondents' perceptions and understandings of the use of service delivery planning approaches that fall between advocacy planning and regulatory planning. Regulatory service delivery planning focuses on the optimal allocation of resources across all competing needs or uses within a society, while advocacy planning aims to mobilise and channel resources to new or neglected uses to achieve the legitimisation of new social goals or the comprehensive redirection of existing goals. To this end, Figure 4 shows that the respondents who believed that the community was in favour of service delivery planning comprised 46% whereas those who were in favour of service delivery planning through regulations represented 54%. From the results, it can be concluded that the regulatory planning of service delivery shifts the locus of decision-making from the public to technicians and thwarts the scope for policy deliberation to remedy past inequities. The PLM continues to struggle to uproot the top-down planning approach in municipal planning [50]. Thus, the municipality cannot foster a collaborative planning approach. The literature on planning argues that regulatory planning neither addresses public reason nor gives substance to democracy. It can also be inferred from the review of findings that service delivery planning by regulatory agencies does not return local government to the citizenry. It can thus be suggested that service delivery planning at the local level should be tempered with a dose of advocacy for improved service delivery and stakeholder consultation. In addition, the use of advocacy will help bridge the gap and reduce tensions between the public and service delivery planning. Decisions about what services are delivered should be practical at the core of the reasons for the existence of a citizen-centred local government. The inability to involve the various stakeholders in the planning and management of the city, despite the decentralisation of decision-making from the upper level of government, shows that decision-making has been centralised at the local government level.

3.3. Presentation of Qualitative Findings

The study's objective was also assessed using qualitative methods. The purpose of this study was to analyse the key stakeholders involved in the service delivery planning process through integrated development planning (IDP), to enhance service delivery in the Polokwane Municipal area. The purpose of this objective is to assess the level of awareness among key informants regarding the various stakeholders that should be engaged in the IDP process. To

test this objective, interviews were conducted with three key informants. The text effectively identified and appropriately presented common and distinctive themes. Thus, the analysis, presentation, and discussion of the qualitative information gathered from the key informants are included in this section. The outcomes are displayed below.

3.3.1. Fitting Public Participation in the Service Delivery Planning Process

The researchers asked the respondents how public participation fit in service delivery planning and the responses are shown below.

The key informant **A** indicated that:

“As we are aware that we are a local municipality and as such, we are guided by the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) document and is a legislated process which argues that for the IDP to be complete the municipality need to conduct a public participation process. Given that this IDP document is used to deliver services to the public it is of great concern that public participation process be conducted before service delivery planning is finalised through IDP. He further added that legislation allows the municipality to draft the IDP, but they must first take that draft to the public and inform the community on what the municipality is planning for them. The way public participation fits in service delivery planning is that it is legislated to say the municipality must consult the public”. The key informant further indicated that “one of the mechanisms for involving communities in the municipal service delivery issues is the ward-based planning sessions that were held annually to try and foster genuine and active involvement of community member in the municipal affairs....in the ward-based planning that’s where the municipality can consolidate the needs of the ward in the IDP.”

The key informant **B** asserted that:

“Before the municipality can bring any services to the public, they must identify the stakeholders which are community members and then do a stakeholder consultation so that the intended beneficiaries are aware and give consent of service delivery planning and they will further communicate a comment resolution. Further indicated that the municipality cannot decide on developmental needs of the community without the community being first consulted and list their priority needs”.

The key informant **C** indicated that:

“Public participation has a significant impact on how residents judge their local municipality.” It has been proven that well-informed residents are more likely to be satisfied with municipal services and be supportive of its work. The informant further indicated that public participation in service delivery planning is facilitated by few legislations notably the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which section 152(1)(e) – obliges Municipalities to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in local government, and Section 195(3)- people’s needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making. Section 4(2)(c) and (d) of Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32, of 2000 shows that the municipal has the duty to (c) encourage the involvement of the local municipality and (e) consult the community about the level quality, range and impact of municipal services provided by the municipality, either directly or through another service provider. “Section 5 of the local government municipal systems Act 32 of 2000 shows that the rights and duties of the community: are members of the community have a right to, through processes provide, contribute to the decision-making

processes and submit written or oral recommendations, representations and complaints to the Municipal Manager or structures”.

Section 16(1) A municipality must inter alia, encourage and create conditions for the community to participate in the affairs of the municipality, including IDP, Performance management system, monitoring, and review of performance preparation of the budget, strategic decisions on municipal service delivery planning. Paragraph (b) municipality must contribute to the capacity building of the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality and councillors and staff to foster community participation. Local Government Municipality Structures Act 117 of 1998; “A category B municipality with a ward participatory system, and executive committees or Executive Mayors must ...annually report on the involvement of communities and community organization in the affairs of the municipality. Section 72 states that the object of a ward committee is to enhance participatory democracy in local government and section 74 sets out functions and powers of ward committees”. “A ward committee may make recommendations on any matter affecting its ward to the ward councilor through the ward councilor to the local municipality and further has such duties and powers as the local municipal may delegate to it”.

The data above indicate that public participation in the service delivery planning fits as it is a legal obligation for communities to be involved and consulted. The data above further affirm that public participation within service delivery planning is not only conducted for legal compliance but because a municipality is for the people and with the people, better explained as “nothing for us without us”. Literature also indicated that one way of promoting effective community participation is to embark on ward-based service delivery planning [30]. This process could culminate in the development of community-based service delivery planning.

3.3.2. Community as part of the Municipal Planning Committee

The researchers asked the respondents whether the community was part of the municipal planning committee and responses are shown below.

All key informants indicated that:

“Yes, the community is part of the municipal planning committee as they are one of the municipal stakeholders within the IDP, Budget and PMS Representative Forum. The community is part of the municipal planning committee as they first participate during consultation and planning for any projects that the municipality would need to implement. They are part of the municipal planning committee given they elected a councillor and a ward committee to represent them and normally ward consultations are undertaken in collaboration with the ward counsellor who's close to the community”.

The data above indicate that PLM provides communities with opportunities to participate in municipal planning. Subsequently, the literature also indicated that one of the key activities towards the attainment of values is the engagement of the public in matters of local government to ensure the relevance and sustainability of development interventions [30]. This implies that public participation is not a once-off process, but rather a continuous process. Consultation should not only end during the identification and prioritisation of the need but also reporting back after every phase to the society is crucial and serves as a complete of communities being part of the municipal planning.

3.3.3. Community Member's Participation in the Municipal Planning

The researcher asked the interviewees how the community members get to participate in the municipal planning committee and responses are shown below.

All key informants asserted that:

"The community gets to participate in municipal planning through the IDP representative forum. In the IDP representative forum, the community is identified as one of the major stakeholders that must be involved in municipal planning. So, the IDP representative forum allows the community to participate in all five phases, which are Phase 1: Analysis, Phase 2: Strategies, Phase 3: Projects, Phase 4: Integration and lastly Phase 5: Approval. They participate in the integrated development planning process which is the core business of the municipal planning committee. The participation of communities in municipal planning is of doing needs prioritisation in terms of service delivery needs as it is the community who knows what constitutes development for themselves. Polokwane local municipality is 70% rural and 30% urban and given that the IDP is based on community needs and priorities. Communities must participate in identifying their most important needs. The IDP process encourages all stakeholders who reside and conduct business within a municipal area to participate in the preparation and implementation of the developmental plan."

The data above affirm that the community is part of municipal planning, although [51] argues that public participation in municipal planning remains a serious challenge despite that it is a legal requirement and not a privilege. The findings above also show that the municipality creates the conditions for the members of the society to have an interest in whatever the municipality is doing regarding service delivery planning. It is critically important for the municipality to involve the community members in the municipal planning processes to ensure that community members are allowed to be active participants in their own development initiatives [35]. The researchers are of the view that the municipality must promote section 14(4) of the Municipal Structures Act, which argues that local communities ought to be encouraged to participate in municipal affairs.

3.3.4. The Status of Public Participation in Polokwane Local Municipality

The researchers asked the key informants how they would describe the status of public participation in the PLM. The responses from the key informants are presented below.

All key informants indicated that:

"We are one of the best municipalities when it comes to conducting public participation process and our process is fair as it is supported by the fact that our IDP document has never been rejected ever since the inception of the integrated development planning process. Each year we ensure that public participation is followed, and communities are given a platform to raise their issues and concerns regarding the development that they want to see in their areas. Our credibility is further supported by the high rating we receive from the office of the National Treasury and Auditor General as when they assess our IDP document they confirm that our public participation article in the IDP document is conducted thoroughly and not only for the sake of compliance with regulation".

The above findings affirm that PLM creates a conducive environment for public participation and further ensures that no one is left behind. Literature also indicated that public participation in rural areas is still a serious challenge [51]. This finding shows that communities of the Polokwane municipal area are taking full control and charge of their development.

4. Discussion

The study accomplished its research purpose by assessing the extent of public participation in service delivery planning, examining the current state of public participation, and identifying the factors that motivate public engagement in service delivery planning. Most participants, approximately 54%, expressed the view that public participation plays a significant role in the effectiveness of service delivery planning. Based on the research findings, the involvement of stakeholders serves to enhance and foster individuals' active involvement in issues that have an impact on them. This facilitates the government's ability to discern the services that are required by the citizenry. The significance of service delivery is widely recognised in enhancing the overall quality of life and facilitating equitable access to socio-economic services. The involvement of stakeholders results in an alternative epistemological perspective. Previously undisclosed or secret information is disseminated to the public sphere, thus becoming accessible to all pertinent stakeholders or those for whom it was originally intended. Consequently, the process of strategising service delivery becomes readily achievable. The spatial proximity between municipalities and stakeholders signifies a mode of governance that embraces the fundamental idea of "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people." This implies that the delivery of services to the public is contingent upon the active involvement and decision-making of the public.

The principle of "Leaving No One Behind" in governance is crucial in the formulation and execution of service delivery planning via the IDP to achieve enhanced service delivery [35]. Therefore, the results of this survey reveal an unfavourable consequence, as they indicate that a majority of the participants (54%) voiced discontent with the current status of public involvement in the planning of service delivery. The discovery made in this study necessitates the adoption of collaborative planning theory and its associated principles by the municipality. Moreover, the participants were solely engaged in speculative conjecture regarding the identification of the individuals they believed to be accountable for orchestrating the provision of services. The data reveal that a significant majority of the respondents, comprising 48%, hold the belief that the responsibility for service planning lies with the conventional authority. This finding underscores the need for further efforts to be undertaken within the realm of local government. The study's findings have significant policy implications, suggesting that the potential for service delivery protests is heightened when stakeholders perceive dissatisfaction with their level of involvement in the planning process. Numerous municipalities have seen protests due to the disregard of constitutional obligations that advocate sustainable service delivery and meaningful engagement of stakeholders [35]. Ensuring stakeholder participation throughout the service delivery planning process is of paramount importance in establishing the credibility and resilience of the IDP [30]. The participation and involvement of stakeholders are of utmost importance in guaranteeing the fulfilment of precise service delivery requirements and preferences.

This study was limited to the specific areas governed by the regulations of the PLM. The study's findings have broader implications for other South African municipalities due to the prevalent issue of inadequate public participation across many municipalities. Numerous empirical and theoretical studies have been carried out in South Africa to examine the relationship between integrated development planning, service delivery planning, and public participation. Although the findings can be applied to other municipalities, it is crucial to recognise that each municipality encounters unique challenges in relation to the service delivery planning process. The applicability of the findings in this study to other

municipalities may be limited. One limitation observed in this study was the unfortunate passing of the Ward Councillor shortly before data collection. Additionally, the establishment of ward committees was not yet in place. Research funding was also a limiting factor, especially for travel to collect data.

5. Conclusions

The issue of promoting active stakeholder participation in service delivery planning remains a significant challenge in numerous municipalities across South Africa, including the PLM. The study acknowledges the existence of a gap between service delivery planning and public participation. Hence, it is imperative to conduct further research to bridge the existing disparity and enhance the knowledge of the public, civil society organisations, and local government professionals. Therefore, it would be beneficial for the PLM to prioritise stakeholders in their municipal planning efforts and actively engage them throughout the entirety of the service delivery planning process. The stages encompass the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating. Transparency and inclusivity should be prioritised in engaging stakeholders, with an emphasis on fostering interactive and deliberative participation. The municipality should also strive to augment its capacity for engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process. The engagement of stakeholders in matters pertaining to local government is a mandated legal requirement, and it is incumbent upon the municipality to establish a favourable atmosphere that facilitates well-informed decision-making processes that duly consider the interests and apprehensions of the broader public. The municipality ought to actively engage in a transparent and inclusive discourse with the wider society, while also extending invitations to pertinent stakeholders, to facilitate their participation in the process of prioritising demands. The implementation of development programmes should not proceed without the active involvement of stakeholders, as sustainable development can only be attained through stakeholder participation, which promotes a sense of ownership and self-sufficiency. The article additionally suggests that the PLM should proactively promote public engagement to resolve concerns pertaining to inadequate participation. This approach has the potential to effectively address service delivery protests and facilitate inclusive decision-making processes, including all relevant stakeholders. The selection of participants who accurately represent the target community is crucial, as is the inclusion of all relevant interests, including those that extend across national boundaries. The procedure needs to be characterised by impartiality and devoid of any political or financial influences. Early public engagement is essential in the policy-making process, with the inputs supplied by participants playing a significant role in shaping the subsequent decision-making process. The perception of the public towards the efficacy of their contributions and the provision of feedback on outcomes is of utmost importance. The principles of transparency and information dissemination are vital, and it is crucial to incorporate public engagement in all aspects of municipal activities, methods, and policies.

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